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MR. ALLEN'S REPORT

OF A

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS

ON

SLAVERY,

DEC. 5, 1837.

SECOND EDITION.

WORCESTER:
PRINTED BY HENRY J. HOWLAND.
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NOTE.

The following pages contain the Report, by Mr. Allen of Shrewsbury, to a Committee of the Convention of Ministers of different denominations in the County of Worcester, called together to express their sentiments on the subject of Slavery. With slight amendments it was reported by said Committee to the Convention. After a protracted discussion, the Report was indefinitely postponed, it being ascertained that its harmonious adoption could not be expected.

REPORT.

The undersigned, ministers of different denominations in the County of Worcester and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, called together to express our sentiments on the subject of Slavery, after careful and solemn deliberation, publish the following as the Declaration of our sentiments on that subject.

We offer no definition of slavery. It has been so long before the public, it has been so separate in the minds of all thinking men from every thing else, it is so little liable to be misunderstood, and it being as easy to cavil at a definition as at a fact, we prefer leaving the sense in which we use the word, to be understood by the connection in which it shall be found, stating, however, that if, to any mind, there may seem cases which are not carefully distinguished by us, our business is not with particular, but general facts: with rules and not with exceptions; with principles and not with anomalies.

In publishing, as in forming, our opinions on slavery, we disclaim all bias for political party, or religious sect; all personal or sectional enmity or jealousy: and we avow that the opinions we have formed are careful, strong, and solemn convictions of right and wrong, of danger and safety, and that the publication of these opinions is from a similar conviction of duty.

We are not insensible to the difficulties which encircle, and which are interwoven with the subject of slavery; nor would we wantonly bring others to a fearful contemplation of them; but, believing that there is no evil so great as sin, and no remedy for evil so certain as duty, we would speak the truth in love, and wound only with the faithfulness of friends.

We attach not great importance to our solitary opinions of slavery, nor flatter ourselves, that, alone, we shall be heeded by those whom we would gladly move to duty, and whose welfare we have much at heart. Our hope is only to mingle our humble voice with the roar of that mighty flood of public sentiment which shall, at length, roll down upon the sin of slavery, and wash out its stain from our country and our race.

To any who may question the propriety of publishing our sentiments on the subject of slavery, we would say,—On such a subject we cannot but think, and, thinking, we cannot but feel. To stifle the voice of nature would be to vex and to destroy those sympathies which a beneficent Creator has stationed in the human bosom for the safety of the human race. — We speak because sin, and, especially, inveterate and wide-spread sin, is a headlong, and not a self-converting power. — We open our mouths for the dumb; because the voice of God within us, and without us, solemnly enjoins this duty. — We speak not only for the oppressed, but for the oppressor, that he may have the benefit of repentance, and escape the evils which sin lays up in store for the transgressor. — We speak because to be neutral is both against our will and beyond our power;—because not to act against known sin, when God gives the opportunity, is to connive at it, and to be an accomplice in its perpetration. On the solemn question now abroad in our land, of human rights, duties, and sufferings, to allow men to mistake or doubt our sentiments is to betray those rights, to deny those duties, and to inflict those sufferings. — We speak because we believe in the power of public sentiment when

spoken ; and because it is the duty of all men to create that power. — We speak because slavery is not a concern foreign from us. As men we respect the rights and feel the wrongs of men. The enslaved are MEN, and with them we claim alliance, by authority of Him who hath made us all of one blood. Whilst we have duties in a limited sphere, we have duties beyond that sphere. As the religion we receive and teach was given to bless mankind, it teaches us to spread its truths as far as the providence of God allows us to reach our fellow men. This revealed duty no human wisdom can legislate off our consciences. Those natural ties are strengthened, this general duty is pressed more forcibly on us, by the position in which we are placed. The sentiments to which we give utterance, regarding, generally, our race, regard, especially, our countrymen, both bond and free. It is not only their manhood that asks for our voice, it is their nearness :—it is the relation in which they stand to us and we to them as component parts of the same nation :—it is the solemn and evident truth, that the character, destiny, and responsible influence of our whole country depend on the freedom, the intelligence, the virtue, the enjoyed rights and practised duties of every part of our country.

Placing our reliance on the might, the wisdom, and the goodness of God, we speak, because his appointed means to convince of sin, and turn men from it ; to teach them their danger, and the way to escape it, is, the proclamation of truth by man. — We speak, because the sin, which is already so great and so alarming, is, every day, growing greater, and spreading its baleful influence more visibly over our whole country ; and because, unless a voice is soon, and from every quarter, loudly uttered against it, its power and its curse will, ere long, be too great to be opposed with hope of success, and its existence will never end, but by its own avenging arm. — We speak to remove a nation's sin, and to forestall a nation's doom. — We speak that our country, purified from its great defilement, may hold out a brighter light to other nations,

and that the present age may work a greater good to the ages that shall come after it.

We speak as MINISTERS, ministers of Him who said, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, BECAUSE he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted—to proclaim liberty to the captives—and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," and because if we have not the Spirit of Christ we are none of his.—We speak as ministers, because the public eye looks upon us, and the public ear waits for our voice;—because, in the stations we occupy, we have high advantages for enlightening the public mind, and guiding the public will; and because a neglect of these advantages is a betrayal of a solemn trust.

We speak *together*, that, after united counsel, the voice of every one may give strength to the voice of every other; and that the united proclamation of our sentiments may swell the note which our brethren, in other parts of our country and of the world, are lifting up against the sin which most of all dishonors, corrupts and endangers our country.

Would that the intelligence and the moral sense of our nation, on the subject of human rights and obligations, were correct; then had we been spared the humiliation of an apology for doing that to which God has given his sanction in the nature of man, and in the written record of his will.

Having stated our reasons for speaking our sentiments on the subject of slavery, we proceed to utter those sentiments.

We regard slavery as the most comprehensive sin which man commits against man. Disregarding the first and great commandment, it breaks the entire mass of the second. It is an invasion on the whole man—on all his powers, rights, enjoyments, and hopes. It annihilates his being as a MAN, to make room for the being of a THING. It robs him of HIMSELF, to make him THE PROPERTY OF ANOTHER.

His BODY, that building fearfully and wonderfully made, is not

HIS. All that makes it, and all that dwells in it, is claimed, held, used, bought, and sold, as ANOTHER'S.

PROPERTY he has none. He cannot acquire it; he cannot inherit it; and, therefore, he cannot own it. Himself a chattel, like other chattels, he is owned, but not an owner. Not a man, but a machine, an implement of toil, a tool of husbandry. 600,000, square miles are his to till, but not a foot of all that wide domain is his to own. No house, not even the wretched cabin where to-night he stretches his weary bones, is his home. To-morrow's light may rise upon him a chained pilgrim to an unknown, far, and friendless land. Even in the grave, the house appointed for all living, he has no certain dwelling place.

NO PRODUCE OF HIS TOIL is his. He planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof. He feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock. He beareth the heat and burthen of the day, not to eat in the sweat of his brow, *his* bread, but the crumbs that fall from a master's table.

THE TIES OF HOME bind not him. That original law, inscribed deep in the nature of man, "For this cause shall a man—cleave to his wife,"—this law to which such might is given, to keep the world from being a wilderness, and to save it from the ferocity of man, is shattered and dissolved throughout the dominion of slavery.

THE OFFSPRING of the slave are not his. They are owned by another. A father's strength may not protect them; a mother's love may not lead and solace them. They are bred for the shambles. They are consecrated from the birth to Mammon and to Lust.

The slave cannot be a Patriot, for he has NO COUNTRY. To him, Revolution is not change. It leaves him as it finds him, a slave. Its principles of liberty for which were pledged "life, fortune, and sacred honor," work no deliverance for the slave. Those universal principles, "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these

are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," though uttered as "self-evident truths," and proclaimed to the world "from a decent respect to the opinions of mankind," * have not yet been heard in the house of bondage. No government contemplates the good of the slave. That Constitution, on whose front is written, "To establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of LIBERTY," † is not broad enough to receive the slave on its foundations. No law is to him a shield. It allows him nothing to be protected. Every department of government is his foe. Even the sanctuary of justice is no refuge from his wrongs. It is the citadel of his master's power. Whatever goes to make up a country for others, goes to make him an alien and an enemy.

The SOUL of the slave is not his. It wears a chain, whose more than iron clanking bespeaks another owner. Ignorance is the strength of his chain. To know is to be free, for knowledge is power both to will and to do.

Over THE AFFECTIONS of the slave the conquest is incomplete. There dominion cannot wholly come. There nature is often stronger than the iron hand of despotism. The Creator of man gave this mysterious power, to kill and to make alive—to be both captivity and redemption. If they lead him captive at their will, they are also the earthquake to open his prison doors. The love of liberty may be smothered, but it is unquenchable fire. The love of kindred is not extinguished in the bosom of the slave. Some have, indeed, been bold enough to affirm that the slave is without natural affection;—that the mother does not refuse to be comforted when her children are not. If such is the condition of the slave, alas! how wide and dreary is the desolation of his bosom! How utter the ruin of that curse which breaks the image of God, by casting

* Declaration of American Independence.

† Preamble of the Constitution of the United States.

it down, from a little lower than the angels, beneath the degradation of the brute! But he has affections. If he is forbidden to cherish them; if the objects on which they yearn are torn from him; if he is compelled to harden his heart in his own bosom, he cannot make it altogether as an adamant.

The religion of good will to men—the glad tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people—that gospel which makes its ministers debtor to the wise and the unwise, to barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, is not the slave's. The page of God's truth and man's best hope, is shut up from his eyes. He may not read in his own tongue the wonderful works of God. The candle of the Lord which should be put upon a table, that it may give light to them that are in the house, is as the dark lantern that helps the robber in his deed of plunder, and keeps the plundered unconscious of the work of desolation. The power of God unto salvation, is made the power of man to destroy. When the word of God is dealt out to the slave at all, it is by piecemeal, and by those fragments which are used to make faster his chain.

Slavery is, by necessity of its nature, jealous, rapacious, vindictive, implacable. It is a denial of all right; an infliction of all wrong. Conscious of wrong, and, therefore, of weakness and danger, it seeks to sustain itself by new inflictions of wrong. Freedom, mind, virtue, truth, the light of religion, the righteous government of God, are objects of its jealousy and hatred. It holds with them no part, no communion, no concord. It arrogates dominion at all times, in all places, and over all things. It usurps authority in the walks of literature, in the mart of commerce, at the domestic fireside, in the hall of legislation, in the temple of justice, in the house of God. It breaks into the sanctuary of home, it violates the natural and chartered right of petition; it restrains the liberty of speech; it invades the freedom and destroys the existence of the press; it drives woman from the foot of the cross; it lays its ruthless hand on

the altar of God, and on him who is ministering at its holy fire; it proclaims virtuous freemen outlaws, and offers, by statute, a bounty on their heads: it inflicts the lash on free citizens, for no crime, without trial, or only the cruel mockery of its shadow; and, at last, to seal its guilt with blood, butchers, with deliberate malice, the noblest son of freedom, on freedom's own soil.

Such is slavery: such are its crimes. And has it so much to do against man, against us, and we nothing to do with it? Shall such a foe to heaven and earth dwell quietly in our land? Shall freemen, whose liberty was bought with their country's sufferings and their father's blood, tamely bear such arrogance and such outrage? Shall the charm of Union outlive the charm of Liberty? of manhood? of honor? of virtue? of reverence to God? of all which union contemplates as a blessing! None cherishes the union more than we. None is more firmly persuaded that the union has every thing to hope for from freedom, and every thing to dread from slavery. Let the union live. Let it outlive every thing but the good for which it was framed.

Slavery ought never to have been; and we believe in the duty and safety of its *immediate abolition*. We believe in the *duty*, because slavery is the violation of *immutable rights* *—because for the continuance of sin there is no warrant in the law of God. We believe that, in this respect, all sin stands on the same footing, and that permission to continue in any sin is an abrogation of all law, and the bringing of confusion into the whole government of God.

We believe in the *safety* of immediate abolition of slavery, as it would be derogatory to the goodness of God to offer discouragement to duty as the rule of his providence; and because the Divine government is ordained to promote the well-being of the governed by their obedience to its laws.—We believe that a denial to man of the

* By the eternal principles of natural justice, no master has a right to hold his slave in bondage for a single hour. Speech of William Pinkney, in the Maryland House of Delegates, 1789.

attributes and claims of humanity is an invitation to resist that denial;—that when such an affront is offered to nature, it will seek, and will create opportunities to resist and to punish such affront; and that to expect its forbearance is to hope that nature will not be true to itself, or that grace will find ends without first finding means. We believe that, as a denial to man of the attributes and claims of humanity is the provocation and the beginning of a curse, so the allowance of them is the invitation and the entrance of a blessing. But we are not left to deductions from abstract principles, to learn that the doing of duty is safe. It is the testimony of God that *Righteousness exalteth a nation;* and it is the promise of God to a people, that when it shall loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burden, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke, *then* shall its light break forth as the morning, and its health shall spring forth speedily. That men may not be faithless, but believing, that they may have strong consolation in fleeing to duty, the promise of revelation has its fulfilment in the open providence of God. Before the face of all people, and under the eyes of this nation, God is now holding forth a specimen of his doings, to show that the principles of his government, the constitution of nature, and the movements of his providence, are all in the same wise and beneficient hand.

Shall we be kept from interposing in behalf of humanity, by the cry, that to speak for the slave is to fasten closer his chain, and to aggravate his sufferings? Doubtless the severities of his bondage are increasing, but the cause is in slavery itself. It is in vain to hope that time, advancing civilization, or even the meek and benign power of religion, will soften the rigors of slavery. Utterly to cease, or to become more cruel, are its only alternatives. The conscience of the slaveholder may, for a little time, be soothed by the dream that increasing severities are the effect of agitating the subject of slavery, in the free States; and that, without this agitation, its wonted severities would be mitigated; but this dream will

quickly pass away. If the voice of faithful and friendly remonstrance be not heard, the stronger cries of the slave, in the desperate energy of nature's struggle, will wake him from that dream. They will teach him that, as the slave and the master are enemies by necessity, so, in the government of man, fear is the only substitute for affection. They will assure him, that the measure of this fear must be proportionate to the power of the slave, and that, by an immutable law, the power of the slave must increase, and the power of the master diminish.

Shall then a false hope or an unmanly fear stifle our voice? Shall slavery inflict its wrongs; shall this enemy of all righteousness stalk through the land, and the followers of a holy religion have no voice to rebuke it? Shall the consecrated ministers of God halt between two opinions? Shall their lips be cold? Or, rather, shall not the unseen messengers of heaven touch their lips as with live coals from off the Lord's altar, and make them flames of fire to consume this enemy of God and man? Do we not wonder and grieve that our enslaved countrymen have so long called in vain for our intercession with God, and our remonstrance with man? — that over such a cause we have slept so long and so deep a sleep? — that, for the oppressed and helpless, we have thought so little, felt so little, done no more? Shall we not redeem the time, knowing that the days are evil? That which is ours to do, let us do, quickly, fearlessly, perseveringly, looking for wisdom and strength to Him who has an arm of might and mercy, to deliver the oppressed and save a guilty land.